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ISLAM AWARENESS WEEK SPECIAL

THE MUSLIM VOICE

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Twelve Hours Old: A Journey to Peace

By Katherine Bullock

What am I doing down here? I wonder, my nose and forehead pressed to the floor as I kneel in prayer. My kneecaps ache, my arm muscles strain as I try to keep the pressure off my forehead. I listen to strange utterings of the person praying next to me. It's Arabic, and they understand what they are saying, even if I don't. So, I make up my own words, hoping God will be kind to me, a Muslim only 12 hours old.

OK. God, I converted to Islam because I believe in you, and because Islam makes sense to me. Did I really just say that? I catch myself, bursting into tears. What would my friends say if they saw me like this, kneeling, nose pressed to the floor?...They'd laugh at me. "Have you lost your mind?" they'd ask. "You can't seriously tell me you are religious!"

Religious. I was once a happy "speculative atheist". How did I turn into a believer and a Muslim? I ask myself. I turn my mind into the past and attempt a whirlwind tour through my journey. But where did it begin?

Maybe it started when I first met practicing Muslims. This was in 1991, at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. I was an open-minded, tolerant, liberal woman. 24 years old. I saw Muslim women walking around the International Centre and I felt sorry for them. I knew they were oppressed. My sorrow increased when I asked them why they covered their hair, why they wore long sleeves in summer, why they were so ill-treated in Muslim countries, and they told me that they wore the veil, and they dressed so, because God asked them too. Poor things. What about their treatment in Muslim countries? That's culture, they would reply. I knew they were deluded, socialised/brainwashed from an early age, into believing this wicked way of treating women. But I noticed how happy they were, how friendly they were, how solid they seemed.

I saw Muslim men walking around the international centre. There was even a man from Libya - the land of terrorists. I trembled when I saw them, lest they do something to me in the name of God. I remembered the television images of masses of rampaging Arab men burning effigies of President Bush, all in the name of God. What a God they must have, I thought. Poor things that they even believe in God, I added, secure in the truth that God was an anthropomorphic projection of us weak human beings. But I noticed that these men were very friendly. I noticed how helpful they were. I perceived an aura of calmness

What a belief they must have, I thought. But it puzzled me. I had read the Qur'an, and hadn't detected anything special about it. That was before, when the Gulf War broke out. What kind of God would persuade men to go to war, to kill innocent citizens of another country, to rape women, to demonstrate against the US? I decided I'd better read the Holy Book on whose behalf they claimed they were acting. I read a Penguin classic, surely a trustworthy book, and I couldn't finish it, I disliked it so much. Here was a paradise described with virgin women in it for the righteous (what was a righteous woman to do with a virgin woman in Paradise?), here was a God destroying whole cities at a stroke.

No wonder the women are oppressed, and these fanatics storm around burning the US flag, I thought. But the Muslims I put this to seemed bewildered Their Qur'an didn't say things in that way. Perhaps I had a bad translation?

Suddenly the praying person I am following stands up. I too stand up, my feet catching on the long skirt I wear; I almost trip I sniff, trying to stop the tears I must focus on praying to God Dear God, I am here because I believe in you, and because during my research of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, and Buddhism, Islam made the most sense Bending over, my hands at my knees, I try hard to reassure myself God. Please help me to be a good Muslim A Muslim! Kathy, how could you - a white western woman who is educated - convert to a religion which makes its women second class citizens! But Kingston's Muslims became my friends, I protest They welcomed me into their community warmly, without question. I forgot that they were oppressed and terrorists. This seems like the start of my journey But I was still an atheist Or was I? I had looked into the starry night, and contemplated the universe The diamond stars strewn across the dark sky twinkled mysterious messages to me I felt hooked up to something bigger than myself Was it a collective human consciousness? Peace and tranquility flowed to me from the stars. Could I wrench myself from this feeling and declare there is no higher being? No higher consciousness?

Haven't you ever doubted the exis-

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The White Man's Burden

The Myth of Fundamentalism in the Modern World

By Wael M. R. Haddara

According to the media, be it television, radio, or newspapers, the world stands witness to a surge in Islamic Fundamentalism.

If some analysts are to be believed, the Green Menace is as dangerous, insidious and destructive as the Red Menace was only a few decades ago. Islamic Fundamentalism seems ubiquitous. It exist everywhere, it touches everyone and like the medusa, destroys everything it comes in contact with. The internal violence in Algeria, the bombings in Israel, the world Trade center in the United States are just examples of the complex web of terrorism that exists in our world today

It has been said that labels are often nothing but fables. Nowhere is this more demonstrably true than in the case of Islamic Fundamentalism. The term has become of household currency. Perhaps even children are familiar with it. Yet, do we understand the term? What is the phenomena to which have so securely attached a label? Communism was easy enough to define, the definition being of albeit questionable value is identifying communists. Defining Islamic fundamentalism, however, is hardly on the same plane.

Dr. Edward W. Said, in his famous work Orientalism, argues that the West has created the Orient Not that the Orient did not exist, but that the western mind has created an image of the Orient and has dealt with nations and individuals of the orient according to that image How true that image is to the original is highly questionable. In creating that image, the West was imposing upon the Orient its own vision, its own understanding, its own fears and its own apprehensions The Orient was viewed through the eyes of the West. This image of the Orient was legitimised and perpetuated and continues to be so by hordes of foreign policy advisors and 'experts'.

Fundamentalism is a wholly Christian notion. It was generated and applied to those who would take it that the Bible is the literal word of God. A natural corollary is that application of biblical texts should also be done literally It is accepted by a large majority of Christians, including Churchmen and

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Assalamu `Alaikum:

Building a Community on the Greetings of Peace

By Abdul-Rehman Malik

Islam provides for Muslims and all humanity a way of life that is not only complete, but functional. Our faith requires from us not only the acceptance and practice of its basic characteristics, but demands that these very principles be put into action; actions that are based on the life and methodology of Prophet Muhammad.

Yet, a Muslim cannot practice Islam alone or within a confined group. Rather, a believer is always seeking the company of other believers with whom to practice the deen, so that the way of Allah is established both individually and collectively. The Qur'an tells us, "...help one another in furthering virtue and God-consciousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity; and remain conscious of Allah: for behold Allah is severe in retribution." **[Surah al-Ma'idah, 2]**

Establish Goodness

Therefore it is incumbent upon us to join one another in establishing goodness and help one another stay away from deeds held reprehensible by Allah. Unlike other ideologies where unity within a community must be constructed from the very beginning, Muslims are already given the universal basis for community and ummah in the Qur'an: "All believers are but brethren. Hence make peace between your two brethren and remain conscious of Allah, so that you might be graced with his mercy." **[Al-Hujurat, 10]**

Allah commands us to make peace with one another, because by virtue of our faith we are already part of the best community raised up for humankind and part of our communal responsibility is that we must treat each other with dignity and respect, while safeguarding one another's rights and honour. As the Messenger of Allah has said, "None amongst you becomes a true believer until he likes for his brother that which he loves for himself." **[Bukhari]** It is important to make clear, that the words brother and brotherhood used here includes the entirety of the Muslim family, both women and men, young and old, from all races and walks of life.

In spite of all the Prophetic wisdom and divine guidance, Muslims fail time and time again to maintain these fraternal ties, with many continuing to live isolated, lost and confused lives. Nevertheless, we say something to one another each day which aught to affirm our commitment to the Islamic ideal as described above, but which instead has become an oft-repeated formula of hollow words and a socially-accepted form of greeting.

Necessity of Salaam

The words, in Arabic, are Assalamu Alaikum, meaning "Peace be Upon You", and they are acknowledged as the universal greeting amongst Muslims, one of the many unique and visible feature of the Islamic way of life. However, do we ever ponder on the meaning and power of these words?

Every time we give this greeting we are not only extending the hand of friendship and love, but we are making a prayer for our Muslim brother or sister. We are asking Allah that He grant them peace and contentment. Islam, as a word means, the attainment of peace through submission to the will of Allah; our greeting reflects our desire that Allah grant Islam to our fellow Muslim in the most complete and beautiful way.

It is narrated that the Prophet Muhammad said: "O you people, exchange greetings of peace, feed people, strengthen the ties of kinship and be in prayer when others are asleep, you will enter Paradise in peace." **[Tirmidhi]**

To give meaning to Assalamu Alaikum, we must examine the context within which the Prophet and his nearest companions used it so that we too can apply it in a way that will help bring us together and closer to Allah.

Nature of Assalamu Alaikum

It is told to us by Aiysha that when she responded to a greeting of peace to she used to respond by saying Assalamu wa Rahmatullahi wa Barakatu, meaning Peace and the Mercy of Allah and His blessings be upon you. The Muslim is encouraged to respond to a greeting with word equal to or better than those given. Furthermore, the Prophet said: "The person nearest to Allah is one who is first to offer salutations." **[Abu Dawud]**

Thus a Muslim goes out of his way to spread the words of peace, using every opportunity to wish a fellow brother or sister well. In fact, Abdullah Ibn Umar used to go to market place solely to give and receive the greetings of peace.

The responsibility does not end with just one greeting either, it is narrated that the Prophet said, "When one of you meets a brother he should salute him. Then if a tree or wall or stone intervenes between them and he meets him again, he should salute him." **[Abu Dawud]** Thus the giving salaam once is not enough, but rather it should become a conscious and meaningful part of our interaction with other Muslims.

Sisters and Brothers

The Messenger of Allah did not limit greeting between just men or between just women, rather his example shows the importance of brothers and sisters greeting one another. The following incidents and ahadith are clear evidence of this assertion.

Sahl bin Sa'd reported has reported: "There was a woman among us who would put beetroot in a kettle and add to it some ground barley. When we returned after performing Friday prayer, we used to greet her and she would offer it to us." **[Bukhari]**

Asma' bint Yazid has reported: "The Messenger of Allah passed by us when we were with a party of women, and he gave us salutation." **[Abu Dawud]** She also reported that the Messenger of Allah passed through the Mosque one day and there was a company of women in the Mosque. *He raised his hand* to offer salutations." **[Tirmidhi]**

Umm Hani daughter of Talib reported: " I went to see the Messenger of Allah...He [the Messenger of Allah] was taking a bath and Fatima was screening him with a cloth. I offered him the greeting of peace **[Muslim]**

Thus we see how the Messenger of Allah behaved towards the women in the early Muslim community, giving them greetings when he would meet or see them, just as they would give him salutation when they would see him. He would even raise his hand to greet them and the companions would give salaam and be given something to drink by one of the women of Medina on their return home from Friday prayers.

At a time when gender relations and the issues relating to it pose serious problems for the Muslim community, it is telling to see that many brothers and sisters pass each other on campus without as much as saying salaam or greeting one another. It is even more telling when we are comfortable speaking to non-Muslim acquaintances of the opposite sex and yet we feel so uncomfortable with our own brothers and sisters in faith that we often ignore them completely. We must learn to interact with one another according to the wisdom of Allah and His Messenger, a sincere desire for this begins by simply saying Assalamu Alaikum; it is a positive step towards building a healthy community.

As we have learned, the greetings of peace are a powerfool tool in building a Muslim community on campus and abroad. Saying Assalamu Alaikum is a way of extending respect and love to your fellow Muslim in the way Allah and His Messenger have dictated. Likewise, we must make an effort to give greetings consciously and with pure intention, thus making each salutation a sincere prayer, thus fulfilling our duties to each other as Muslims.

Allah says, "...pay heed unto God and the Apostle, so that you might be graced with mercy. And vie with one another to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness and to a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for the God-conscious who spend in time of plenty and in time of hardship, and hold in check their anger, and pardon their fellow-men, because Allah loves the doers of good." **[Ali-'Imran, 132-4]**

May Allah grant us forgiveness for our short comings and unite us in peace and faith. Ameen.

Abdul-Rehman Malik is second year student of Political Science at the University of Toronto, and the current President of MSA at U of T. He can be reached at arm@epas.utoronto.ca.

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Advisors:
Abdul-Rehman Malik
Nabil Rehman

Contributors:
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The Muslim Voice seeks to present Muslim perspectives on issues of concern to students. The majority of the articles are written by and for university students.

In 1993-94, we had 17 issues of the newsletter. Our circulation started at 250 and rose to 5000 copies by the end of the year with this issue printing 8000. This publication was produced with the efforts of students and other Muslims from across North America.

If you have any questions or concerns, please call Kamal Syed, at 905-890-8620 or email Faraz Rabbani at: frabbani@epas.utoronto.ca.

You can mail articles to:
The Muslim Voice
MSA U of T
International Students' Centre
33 St. George St
Toronto, Ontario, M5S 2E3

MSA-NET:

Muslims on Information Super-Highway

by Aalim Zakee Fevens

The MSA-Net was conceived of during the preparations for an Inter-MSA meeting during the ISNA-Canada Annual Convention in May, 1991.

During this meeting, an initial electronic mailing list was formed. One of the organizers of the Inter-MSA meeting, Br. Boualem Sekhri, wrote the initial shell program which operates the MSA-Net mailing list, and installed it at a special MSA address at Queen's University.

Initially, the MSA-Net was intended to be a medium for communication between members of the MSAs in North America. The main purpose was to facilitate Islamic work at the MSA level and particularly at an inter-MSA level.

As interest in the MSA-Net grew, members soon joined from England, and then other countries from around the globe. Eventually, a number of non-students started joining, and currently comprise a large segment of the membership. Presently, the membership ranges from high school students, to university students, to prison Imams, to leaders of the Muslim community in North America.

Further, in November, 1993, it was decided by the MSA-Net Shura committee, to restrict the membership in the MSA-Net to Muslims only. Currently the membership is around 450 direct members spread over around 15 countries.

Many more receive MSA-Net mail second-hand. With the growth of the number and diversity of members, the focus of the MSA-Net shifted from MSA issues to general discussion on Islamic issues. The postings on the MSA-Net range from news items, personal opinions on various subjects, expositions on Islamic subjects, announcements of meetings, conferences, lectures, and so on. Occasionally, very interesting discussions arise on the Net. Especially when the topic turns to issues that don't seem to find proper exposure in Masjids, such as domestic violence. Also, with some initiative, there are targeted discussions such as the popular Islamic Movements series.

The reasons that people join the MSA-Net vary, as do their expectations. Some are new Muslims, seeking to learn more about their rediscovered deen; some are activists, looking to meet other activists, some live in isolated areas, far from large Muslim communities, trying to stay in touch; some are community members, curious about this information highway; most are students wanting to exchange ideas with other students.

Reaction to the MSA-Net also vary. Some are challenged by the wide variety of new ideas, while others are inspired. But sometimes, due the rather eclectic mix of Muslim cultures, levels of understanding of Islam, and natural range of personalities, some issues tend to lead to postings of a unpleasant variety. To facilitate the enforcement of Islamic behaviour, a Charter for the MSA-Net was introduced in October 1993. This Charter has evolved to accommodate the types of problems that arise on the MSA-Net.

Due to the rather heavy email traffic on the MSA-Net and the general nature of the postings, it was decided by the Shura Committee that a parallel net had to be established to cater only to MSA and inter-MSA issues and communication needs. This net, the MSA-ORGanizational Net, was established in January 1994, and now represents over 150 MSAs in North America. The target group for the MSA-ORG net is MSA executive members and active MSA workers. Some of the projects that are partially coordinated via the MSA-ORG net are the Islam Awareness Week project, other MSA-National projects, and inter-MSA events such as conferences, workshops, etc.

In addition, to address a similar need locally, an MSA-ONTario net was also established to enhance communication between the executives of the MSAs in Ontario. Currently, all the MSAs in Ontario are represented on the MSA-ONT net.

Apart from the MSA-Net mail, the MSA-Net provides a number of other services. Some receive the MSA-Net mail in the form of a Daily Digest, The MSA-Net Database is a service that allows members of the MSA-Net to store or retrieve text files that are of interest to the MSA-Net members. Among the 230 files stored in the database are articles on Islamic issues, khutbahs, resource lists, the manuals of the MSA-Net, etc. Access to the database is via an automatic email server.

To subscribe to the MSA-Net or of any of the Nets mentioned above, please send an email to:

msa-request@htm3.ee.queensu.ca

The MSA-Net is also mentioned in published Internet directories, under subject heading Islam or MSA. If you are a member of an MSA executive, please note that in your subscription.

Aalim Fevens is a graduate student at Queen's University in Physics/Computer Science and is extremely active in the student Muslim community. He can be reached at fevens@qucis.queensu.ca

Sisters' Net

By Mona Rahman

The Sisters Net was first established on February 14, 1992, in order to create a support group for Muslim sisters around the world. The initial group consisted of about 14 Muslimaat. Now, two years later, there are over 120 sisters on the net from all over the world, and our numbers are still increasing Masha Allah!

As Muslimaat, we face different challenges/dilemmas than our Muslim brothers. Moreover, there are certain issues which Muslim sisters would feel uncomfortable discussing with our male counterparts. The exclusive nature of Sisters Net provides a discussion forum in which Muslim sisters can freely participate. The following is a rough outline of the goals of the Net:

1) To increase our Islamic knowledge.
2) To allow Muslim sisters to discuss tribulations, aspirations, triumphs, etc. in an INFORMAL manner.
3) To encourage each other to take a stand and work for the sake of Allah (SWT).
4) To network with our fellow sisters.

Masha Allah, Islam has expanded from a tiny community in the Arabian Peninsula to one which encompasses the world. Alhamdulillah, through the medium of e-mail, we are able to diminish these barriers of distance thus allowing Muslim sisters from around the world to develop bonds of sisterhood and maintain the feeling of being part of a global Muslim Ummah.

For more information regarding Sisters net, please send mail to the following e-mail address.

sisters-request@qucdn.queensu.ca

Mona Rahman is a student at Queen's University, and is the Sisters Net Administrator

The Islamization of Knowledge Project

By Omar Haydar

The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) has a project which MSA's should take advantage of. IIIT has long been working on a project of "Islamization of Knowledge". They hold seminars, publish numerous books by respected scholars, and work at presenting Islam at a scholarly level to the world. To quote some of the background material:

"The Muslim World is economically, politically and educationally underdeveloped. This is equally true whether measured on the scale of the Islamic Ideal and potential or compared to western countries. Educational reform is the key to change in the Muslim world. Availability of good education will lead to a qualitative improvement in the social, political, and religious consciousness of the masses which is a pre-requisite for major social change.

The Education system is in a crisis. The crisis is manifesting in 4 ways:

a) Duality, the existence of 2 parallel and contradictory education systems: traditional Islamic and secular adopted from the West

b) The disciplines and knowledge imparted in most schools and universities are in a distinctly western and secular context

c) In the countries where Muslims are minorities, schools for Muslim students are set up through the efforts of Islamic organizations. In order to be funded and credited these schools must be operated within the national educational system of each country, and hence must follow all sorts of regulations created by major decision makers.

d) There is widespread disillusionment with the Western system of education.

The efforts at integration and Islamization have not yet succeeded. The imported western secular system is dominant in most Muslim countries and has the material and moral backing of the state.

Realizing these issues, it is imperative upon Muslim scholars/students to find solutions to these problems by offering an Islam intellectual alternative in epistemology, thought and education. In this context, the process of and the need for Islamization of Knowledge cannot be over-emphasized in the effort to emancipate the Muslim ummah from the shackles of Western and secular approach of both acquiring and imparting knowledge.

Project Objectives:

a) Make Muslim students aware of the nature and causes of the education crisis in the Muslim education.

b) Introduce educational reform as the basis for social change and Islamization of the whole society.

c) Address the issue of Islamization of Knowledge as a potential to the crisis of Muslim education

d) Encourage students to select graduate research topics that address the crisis in Muslim education and Islamization of the various disciplines of knowledge."

What IIIT is offering is to hold a number of one day seminars later on this year, aimed at presenting their "Islamization of Knowledge" project to the MSA and the Muslim Students at large. Included in this offer is a sum to cover any fees (such as room rental), a number of preparatory informative booklets for the participants to go through before the seminar (depending on the number of attendees), as well as a collection of IIIT's excellent publications which relate to the project for the MSA's library.

The seminars should run between 4-6 hours, and include lectures, discussions and stimulation sessions. Part of the discussion will be dedicated to presentations of proposals for projects and activities for MSA's followed by a discussion session. They will also incorporate a scholarship program to encourage work in the future, and also develop a mailing list which includes individuals dedicated to this sort of work.

The plan is to organize 15 seminars at various MSA's across the US and Canada between October and December. Dr Omar Kasule and Sulaiman Nyang are expected to chair some of these seminars.

If you would just like more information, please contact IIIT representative Shahran Kasim (703)471-1133.

Omar Haydar is an artsy studying at the University of Michigan, and can be reached at omh@umcc.umich.edu

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Ruling on Headscarves Angers Muslims in France

By Julian Nundy
in Paris

NINE French Muslim associations have protested against "the climate of intolerance which is developing in our country" after the Education Ministry issued instructions to headteachers to discourage Muslim girls from wearing headscarves in state schools.

The initiative by Francois Bayrou, the centrist Education Minister, follows five years in which the wearing of the veil has become a recurring issue in the state lycees. Issued last weekend, the instructions encourage school principals to dissuade pupils from wearing signs of their religious faith while insisting they should do nothing to attract media attention. Mr. Bayrou's new measure comes as the French government is increasingly worried at signs of a rise of Islamic fundamentalism in France, mainly spilling over from the civil strife in Algeria.

In 1989 when Ernest Cheniere, the Caribbean head of a lycee in Creil north of Paris who has since become a Gaullist member of the National Assembly, first banned scarf-wearing girls in his school, only 20 girls were reckoned to be attending schools in Muslim dress. At the end of June when schools broke up for the summer, there were more than 700.

Although the wearing of scarves has touched on a number of different Muslim communities, from Turks to North Africans, the increase has coincided with the rise of fundamentalism in Algeria. In several cases, banning girls from attending school in scarves has created a dispute with local immigrant bodies; in others, headteachers have preferred to turn a blind eye.

Mr Bayrou's memorandum, appealing to principals "to convince rather than force", said "I ask you to reject any mediatisation. No pictures. No statements by you or your staff". The statement by Muslim associations on Tuesday said the ban on the veil could result in Muslims "pulling their children out of school to conduct their education themselves". That, they said, could create "a risk of exclusion which nobody wants in our Muslim community".

This article is an excerpt from The Independent, the European News Page, for September 15, 1994

The Root of the Hijab Controversy in Quebec

By Sheema Khan

"They seem obsessed to press her to confess that she's oppressed,
To which she answers: 'Don't mess with my dress!'"
(by Altaf Khairuddin, from the album "MYNA Raps")

The dismissal of 13-year-old Emilie Ouimet from Louis Riel Highschool, and the ensuing dialogue about the hijab in Quebec, has unveiled the latent racism which exists towards Muslim practice. Curiously, this prejudice, which stems from ignorance, has been strongly evident amongst the "enlightened" members of our society: intellectuals, writers, politicians, educators, and government officials.

Ms. Ouimet appeared at her school, dressed according to the Islamic guidelines of modesty, which accord dignity and respect to the human being. That this young woman chose to go against peer pressure to assert her identity is an example in self-assertiveness which few 13-year olds can claim. Yet, the principal ignorantly lumped her choice of dress into the same category as neo-Nazi garb, and summarily sent her home for not conforming to the majority. Not only was this an act of religious discrimination, it was completely contrary to the very essence of education: to broaden minds, and encourage people to learn, understand and appreciate differences. Instead, students were given the message that it is better to follow the effortless path of prejudice.

Yet, this was not enough. Some have said that the hijab is a symbol of submissiveness; therefore, Muslim women should remove it. What hypocrisy. The hijab is deemed as inferior, and under the guise of "liberation", Muslim women are told to give up their identity and submit to an ideology which they do not agree with. Another patronizing attitude is: "when in Rome, do as the Romans do". In contemporary society, the vibrancy of a culture is enhanced by its openness towards the richness of human experience. Furthermore, those who espouse such a stance forget that when their ancestors first came here, little attempt was made to adopt the culture of this nation's indigenous people.

But, the cultural imperialism does not stop there. In an opinion piece written October 6th, by the Montreal Gazette's Eve McBride, we are told repeatedly that "wearing it [the hijab] might not be a real choice." As many of us have realized, so long as our choice agrees with the prevailing Western feminist paradigm, it is valid. But if our choice is contrary to what women like Ms. McBride are "comfortable" with, then it is not a real choice in their eyes. They claim to "value choice", while in reality, it is acquiescence which is valued. Similarly, it is not the hijab which is worrisome; instead it is the rejection of Western feminism by women who have been raised and educated in North America.

Rather than examine the possible inadequacies of feminism, many conveniently assume that those who wear hijab are in a category different from "Western" women. Think again. On September 4, the Times of London reported that thousands of British women have embraced Islam within the past few years. They come from a variety of backgrounds: Anglican, Catholic, aristocracy, working-class, educated, single, professional, and married. There is also a trend towards renewed commitment to the faith by those born Muslim. What all these women share in common is the search for spirituality in a secular environment. They travel a path of deep introspection, study of Islamic teachings, and critical analysis of contemporary norms. While completing a doctorate in Chemical Physics at Harvard, I gave careful thought to my purpose in life, and I came to accept Islam as a complete way of life. At its essence is submission to the One God (Allah) alone - and nothing else. Liberation comes from knowing that one is at the mercy of an infinitely merciful Creator, rather than at the mercy of people or objects.

Out of this compassion emanates guidelines for all human endeavor, including male-female interaction. The Qur'an first directs men to "lower their gaze and be modest" [24:30]. This is also enjoined upon women, with the explicit directive for drawing their headcovers over their bosoms in the presence of men to whom they not related by blood or marriage [24:31]. It is not Muslim men who decide the standards of dress for Muslim women. However, in North America and Europe, women's fashions are decided primarily by male designers in Paris, New York, and Milan. In which case does one segment of society decide the dress code for another segment?

There have been plenty of sweeping judgments made about Islam in the classroom, popular media, and literature. If Canadians claim to value honesty in scholarship, then we must go beyond ignorant assumptions, and take a deeper look at the foundations of Islamic belief which are rooted in God-consciousness. Given the failure of modern secular thought to address spiritual needs, is it at all surprising that women (and men) are turning to faith for personal fulfillment?

Sheema Khan is a graduate student in Chemistry at McGill university. She can be reached at: khan@maxwell.chem.mcgill.ca.

The Mind's Eye

"Though you see Him not, surely He sees you."

By Munazzah Shirwani

There I was in the Reading Room of Roharts. The books in front of me lay open, but it was just an illusion. I was in fact toying my outmost to find a fulfilling distraction.

My gaze wandered up to the ceiling with its funny triangles. I smiled to myself as I imagined the ceiling to be a one-way window. Wouldn't it be funny if the guy two tables down proceeded to clean his ears with his click pencil? Then, in a pretence of cleaning his desk, he would get rid of the evidence..

Imagine if he knew that a horde of keen eyes had been watching his "wax-ectomy" all along! Of course, the point is clear.

Our concern in not so much who might be watching us from the Third Floor, but the reality that Allah the Most High (al-'Ala) is watching us from above.

It is almost like the scenario I just gave, " While you see Him not, yet truly He sees you" **[Muslim]**, we are being watched and heard by the All-Seeing, All-Hearing (al Baseer, as-Sameer).

It is such a simple fact, and yet were we to grasp it, it would help us in our human, social and moral development.

We all know it: the fact that Allah sees everything we do and every intention we have is not a secret. It is something we need to remind ourselves of, the consequences of being aware the Allah is All-Seeing (al Baseer) are fruitful.

When people become aware that Allah is "up there" looking at us, aware of the very motivation of our soul and the very chemistry of our being, then they realize their place in the universe and become humble.

Allah has created us for the specific purpose that we serve Him. "And I have not created Jinn and humans except that they serve (worship) Me" **[Sura al-Dhaariyaat: 56]**

This means that we become the worshippers ('abd) of Him, and not of our desires, nor of our peers, wealth or family. That is to say that when something has to be done, we should think of the most beneficial way of approaching it. In short, we must keep in mind at all times that He is watching, and should not do what He would not want us to do. And who knows the best way of doing things but the Creator? So when we see a choice of several paths, we should choose the one most pleasing to the Creator.

Sometimes, we forget to look up from the grind-stone of life, then matters become disproportionate, because we do not take time out to think, "Hold on, is Allah pleased with what I am doing?"

The main issue I have been trying to get across is that our attitude towards our actions should be one of Goodness, and Goodness is *Ihsan*.

The Angel Jibra'eel (Gabriel) asked the Prophet (saw), "Tell me about *Ihsan*." He (saw) replied, "It is to worship Allah as though you were seeing Him, and while you see Him not, yet truly He sees you..." **[Muslim]**

Just like the people looking through the one-way window...

So, remember this piece of advice, "If you want to do something which you know Allah does not like, then you had better go somewhere He cannot see you!"

Munazzah Shirwani is a student at the University of Toronto, and has been active in Islamic work on both sides of the "Big Pond."

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Inspiration for Liberation

by Melodie Smith
(Iman El Maghribi)

In 1980, I met and married a practicing Muslim from Libya. I set out right away to Westernize/ Christianize him — mainly to get him to "loosen up" and have some "fun" (or at least what I thought was fun at the time). The more I tried to persuade him, the more he was convinced to stay the same. I finally realized that I'd better get educated in my own religion before I tried to convince others of it. That was the best thing that ever happened to me, because it literally led me to Islam.

Long before I took shahada, I was convinced that Islam was the only true religion...it was the issue of hijab that I got stuck on. I grew up in the 60's when women were fighting hard for their rights (even if they didn't know what those rights were yet). I considered myself a progressive thinker, and I had a rebellious/feminist side to be reckoned with before I could embrace Islam wholeheartedly. I visited the local masjid in Atlanta, and then I attended a ISNA conference in Kentucky. There I saw hundreds of Muslim women who donned their hijab with pride and dignity. They were treated with respect, what feminist westernmers like me wanted all along. I tried on a scarf at the conference and got my husband to buy me a long dress. Then a sister from Turkey mistook me for a Muslim, and when she learned in our conversation that I wasn't, she began to weep and beg me to learn about Islam. I thought...either this woman is as loony as they come, or she knows something I don't.

Being the curious creature that I am, I had to find out what that was. Well I did, I found that the hijab was NOT for men (although it is partly because of them), it was for Allah. It is an outward symbol of liberation, not oppression. In a world where "beauty" comes before "brains", it forces people to take women seriously, and judge them by their intelligence and deeds. It was as though a light went on in my head...was this all I had been hung up on? Hijab was the greatest thing in history to happen to women, and I had been looking at it with blind eyes all along!

Needless to say, I became a Muslim, and am now a student at the University of Georgia and am interested in Islamic Studies. I have a special affection for my "scarves" as they attract people to me like a beacon in the dark and have enabled me to give da`wah countless times. Since I don't blend in with the woodwork, I am well known on campus, and have even been invited to speak at many functions. One instructor invited me to address his class, and another even invited me to speak at her church! But best of all, my hijab enticed one instructor to learn more about Islam, and she converted!

I have heard some women say that they don't feel hijab is important to women any longer because they feel hijab was meant as a protection that we no longer need. If this is true, why are women still being discriminated against and sexually exploited? I have heard others say that they feel it may attract attention, and that hijab was meant to deter this. As far as I am concerned, the more attraction, the better! I wear my hijab and get salaams or "hi Iman, what's new" everyday. And I thank Allah that He gave me the opportunity to be truly liberated, and a member of His Umma

Iman El-Maghribi embraced Islam 13 years ago and is an activist in issues concerning Muslim women. She can be reached at 0302IMAN@MUSIC.CC.UGA.EDU

Being Muslim in the 90's

Coming to terms with modern society

By Nusheen Ameenuddin

I wake up just before dawn with the words "In the name of Allah the Beneficient, the Merciful". My eyes are still heavy with sleep, but I pull myself out of bed for Fajr prayer. By the time I finish, I feel ready to begin another day as a Muslim.

Living as a Muslim means constantly striving to please Allah, our Lord and Creator. This is so important because part of what we are judged on is striving in His way and the sincerity with which we strive. Everything I do must be oriented to this purpose, whether it is praying five times a day, going to school to seek knowledge, or being kind to others. Each day, I think of what I can do to please Allah(swt) and become worthy of His infinite mercy.

Being a Muslim means always trying to improve myself. In Islam, learning is a process that begins in the cradle and ends only in the grave. There is no point where I can say that I am good Muslim and that is enough, because we continuously grow in Islam. This means striving to be more than a Muslim in name only. Instead, I try to follow Islam in every aspect of my life.

Striking a balance in all that we do is part of the essence of living as a Muslim. We must learn to live in this world without being absorbed by it. In the same way, we must become spiritually centered without abandoning our worldly duties.

Living Islam also means knowing that *everything* has a purpose. We may think something is good, bad, or insignificant, but all that happens is a part of Allah's Grand Plan. It is this faith that sustains us through hard times with composure and prevents us from becoming arrogant when we are blessed with good fortune from Allah.

Islam also teaches discipline. Proof of this is found in our five mandatory daily prayers. Salat, as it is called, structures a Muslim's life in a way that nothing else can. Constantly remembering this duty keeps us focused on our ultimate goal—pleasing Allah. Because the prayers are spread throughout the day, we literally build our day around them. Salat becomes a main focus in our life, not just something we think of once in a long while.

I would feel scattered without prayer. It gives me a chance to put aside my worldly concerns. Far from being a burden, it is one of the most refreshing experiences I have the pleasure of participating in. When I am praying, it feels like I am in my own little space in the world—an oasis of peace. Prayer is the time when I can release my mind and open my heart. This makes me realize that the Islamic lifestyle is the most natural way of life.

At night, after finishing my homework and praying Isha, I often reflect on the day's events. I sometimes wonder what I learned from a given event and how it fits into Allah (swt)'s Plan for me. The answer is not always obvious, but I will probably look back on this in the future and then realize how it shaped me as a Muslim.

Before falling asleep, I whisper "Laa ilaha illallah Muhammadan Rasullullah". My day ends with the words that make me a Muslim: There is no god but Allah and Muhammed(SAW) is His Messenger.

Nusheen Ameenuddin is a freshman at Kansas State University. She can be reached at NUSHEEN@KSUVM.KSU.EDU

Islamic Jihad

Islam has specific laws for the conduct of war. For example, these were the instructions of Abu Bakr (raa), the first Khalifah after the Prophet, to the Muslim army:

"Do not be harsh on them; do not kill children, old men or women; do not cut down or burn palm trees, do not destroy fruit trees, do not slay a sheep or camel except for food. If you see people who have taken refuge in monasteries, let them be safe in their place of refuge."

[Quoted in Islam the Natural Way, by Abdul Wahid Hamid, MELS 1989, p. 136]

Allah (May He be praised and Exalted) says in the Qur`an:

O ye who believe! believe in Allah and His Messenger and the scripture which He hath sent to His Apostle and the scripture which He sent to those before (him). And who denieth Allah His angels His Books His Messengers and the Day of Judgment hath gone far far astray.

[The Qur`an: al-Nisaa / The Women (4):136]

It is not righteousness that ye turn your faces toward East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels and the Book and the Messengers; to spend of your substance out of love for Him for your kin for orphans for the needy for the wayfarer for those who ask and for the ransom of slaves; to be steadfast in prayer and practice regular charity; to fulfil the contracts which ye have made; and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth the Allah-fearing.

[The Qur`an: al-Baqara / The Calf (2):177]

The Prophet (Peace and blessings be upon him) teaches:

A beduin came to the Holy Prophet (pbuh) and asked a number of pertinent questions. The following dialogue took place:

Beduin: I wish to be the richest man in the world.
Prophet: Be content and you will be the richest man in the world
Beduin: I would like to be the most learned of men
Prophet: Fear Allah and you will be the most learned of men.
Beduin: I would like to be the most just of men.
Prophet: Desire for others what you would desire for yourself and you will be the most just of men.
Beduin: I would like to be the best of men.
Prophet: Be good to others, and you will be the best of men.
Beduin: I wish to be safe from Allah's wrath on the day of Judgement.
Prophet: If you do not lose your temper with any of your fellow men, you will be safe from Allah's wrath on the Day of Judgement.
Beduin: What are the worst evils in the sight of Allah?
Prophet: Hot temper and miserliness.

Source. *The Musnad* of Imam Ahmad

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Twelve hours old: my journey to peace

(Continued from page 1)

tence of God? I would ask my believing Christian and Muslim friends. No, they replied. No? No? This puzzled me. Was God that obvious? How come I couldn't see God It seemed too much a stretch of my imagination. A being out there, affecting the way I lived How could God listen to billions of people praying, and deal with each second of that person's life? It's impossible. Maybe a First Cause, but one who intervened? And what about the persistence of injustice in the world? Children dying in war. A just, good God couldn't allow that God didn't make sense. God couldn't exist. Besides, we evolved, so that disposed of a First Cause anyway.

We kneel down again, and here I am, sniffing, looking sideways at my fingers on the green of my new prayer mat I like my prayer mat It has a velvetty touch to it, and some of my favourite colours: a purple mosque on a green background There is a path leading to a black entrance of the mosque and it beckons me The entrance to the mosque seems to contain the truth, it is elusive, but it is there I am happy to be beckoned to this entrance.

When I was much younger I had a complete jigsaw picture of the world. It fell apart sometime during the third or fourth year of my undergraduate study. In Kingston I had reminded myself that I had once been a regular churchgoer, somewhat embarrassed, since I knew that religious people were slushy/mushy, quaint, boring, old fashioned people. Yet God had seemed self-evident to me then. The universe made no sense without a Creator Being who was also omnipotent. Leaving church I had always had a feeling of lightness and happiness. I felt the loss of that feeling. Could it be that I had once had a connection to God which was now gone? Maybe this was the start of my journey? I tried to pray again, but found it extraordinarily difficult. Christians told me that people who didn't believe in Lord Jesus Christ were doomed. What about people who've never heard of Jesus? Or people who follow their own religion? And society historically claimed women were inferior because Christianity told us it was Eve's punishment; women were barred from studying, voting, owning land. God was an awful man with a long white beard. I couldn't talk to him. I couldn't follow Christianity, therefore God couldn't exist. But then I discovered feminists who believed in God, Christian women who were feminists, and Muslim women who believed Islam did not condone a lot of what I thought integral to their religion. I started to pray and call myself a 'post-christian feminist believer.' I felt that lightness again; maybe God did exist. I carefully examined my life's events and I saw that coincidences and luck were God's blessings for me, and I'd never noticed, or said thanks. I am amazed God was so kind and persistent while I was disloyal.

My ears and feet tingle pleasantly from the washing I have just given them; a washing which cleanses me and allows me to approach God in prayer God An awesome deity. I feel awe, wonder and peace Please show me the path. But surely you can see that the world is too complex, too beautiful, too harmonious to be an accident? To be the blind result of evolutionary forces? Don't you know that science is returning to a belief in God? Don't you know that science never contradicted Islam anyway? I am exasperated with my imaginary jury. Haven't they researched these things?

Maybe this was the most decisive path. I'd heard on the radio an interview with a physicist who was explaining how modern science had abandoned its nineteenth century materialistic assumptions long ago, and was scientifically of the opinion that too many phenomena occured which made no sense without there being intelligence and design behind it all. Indeed, scientific experiments were not just a passive observation of physical phenomena, observation altered the way physical events proceeded, and it seemed therefore that intelligence was the most fundamental stuff of the universe. I read more, and more. I discovered that only the most diehard anthropologists still believed in evolution theory, though no one was saying this very loudly for fear of losing their job. My jigsaw was starting to fall apart.

When I was much younger I had a complete jigsaw picture of the world. It fell apart ... Have you ever doubted the existence of God, I would ask my believing friends,. No, they replied.

OK, so you decided God existed. You were a monotheist. But Christianity is monotheistic. It is your heritage. Why leave it? Still these questioners are puzzled. But you must understand this is the easiest question of them all to answer. I smile. I learned how the Qur'an did not contradict science in the same way the Bible did. I wanted to read the Biblical stories literally, and discovered I could not. Scientific fact contradicted Biblical account. But scientific fact did not contradict Qur'anic account, science even sometimes explained a hitherto inexplicable Qur'anic verse. This was stunning. There was a verse about how the water from fresh water rivers which flowed into the sea did not mix with the sea water; verses describing conception accurately; verses referring to the orbits of the planets. Seventh century science knew none of this. How could Muhammed be so uniquely wise? My mind drew me towards the Qur'an, but I resisted.

I started going to church again, only to find myself in tears in nearly every service. Christianity continued to be difficult for me. So much didn't make sense: the Trinity; the idea that Jesus was God incarnate; the worship of Mary, the Saints, or Jesus, rather than God. The priests told me to leave reason behind when contemplating God. The Trinity did not make sense, and nor was it supposed to. I delved deeper. After all, how could I leave my culture, my heritage, my family? No one would understand, and I'd be alone. I tried to be a good Christian. I learned more. I discovered that Easter was instituted a couple of hundreds of years after Jesus's death, that Jesus never called himself God incarnate, and more often said he was the Son of Man; that the doctrine of the Trinity was established some 300 odd years after Christ had died; that the Nicence Creed which I had faithfully recited every week, focusing on each word, was written by MEN at a political meeting to confirm a minority position that Jesus was the Son of God, and the majority viewpoint that Jesus was God's messenger, was expunged forever. I was so angry! Why hadn't the Church taught me these things. Well. I knew why. People would understand that they could worship God elsewhere, and that there, worship would actually make sense to them. I would only worship one God, not three, not The Father, Son and Holy ghost; not Jesus as Lord, nor the Saints, nor Mary. Could Muhammed really be a Messenger, could the Qur'an be God's word? I kept reading the Qur'an. It told me that Eve was not alone to blame for the 'fall'; that Jesus was a Messenger; that unbelievers would laugh at me for being a believer; that people would question the authenticity of Muhammed's claim to revelation, but that if they tried to write something as wise, consistent and rational they would fail. This seemed true. Islam asked me to use my intelligence to contemplate God, it encouraged me to seek knowledge, it told me that who believed in one God (Jews, Christians, Muslims or whoever) would get rewards, it seemed a very encompassing religion.

We stand again and still standing, bend down again to a resting position with our hands on our knees. What else can I say to God? I can't think of enough to say, the prayer seems so long. I puff slightly, still sniffling, since with all the standing and kneeling and standing I am somewhat out of breath. So you seriously think that I would willing enter a religion which turned me into a second class citizen? I demand of my questioners. You know that there is a lot of abuse of women in Islamic countries, just as in the West, but this is not true Islam. And don't bring the veil thing up. Don't you know that women wear hijab because God asks them to? Because they trust in God's word. Still. How will I have the courage to wear hijab? I probably won't. People will stare at me, I'll become obvious; I'd rather hide away in the crowd when I'm out. What will my friends say when they see me in that?? OH! God! Help.

I had stalled at the edge of change for many a long month, my dilemma growing daily. What should I do? Leave my old life and start a new one? But I couldn't possibly go out in public in hijab. People would stare at me. I stood at the forked path which God had helped me reach. I had new knowledge which rested comfortably with my intellect. Follow the conviction, or stay in the old way? How could I stay when I had a different outlook on life? How could I change when the step seemed too big for me? I would rehearse the conversion sentence: There is no God but God and Muhammed is his prophet. Simple words, I believe in them, so convert. I cannot, I resisted. I circled endlessly day after day. God stood on one of the paths of the fork, tapping his foot. Come on Kathy. I've brought you here, but you must cross alone. I stayed stationary, transfixed like a kangaroo trapped in car lights late at night. Then one night, God, I suppose, gave me a final yank. I was passing a mosque with my husband. I had a feeling in me that was so strong I could hardly bear it.

If you don't convert now, you never will, my inner voice told me. I knew it was true. OK, I'll do it. If they let me in to the mosque, I'll do it. But there was no one there. I said the shahaada under the trees outside the mosque. I waited. I waited for the thunderclap, the immediate feeling of relief, the lifting of my burden. But it didn't come. I felt exactly the same.

Now we are kneeling again, the world looks so different from down here. Even famous football players prostrate like this, I remember, glancing sideways at the tassles of my hijab which fall onto the prayer mat; we are all the same and equally humbled before God. Now we are sitting up straight, my prayer leader is muttering something still, waving his right hand's forefinger around in the air I look down at my mat again. The green, purple and black of my prayer mat look reassuringly the same. The blackness of the Mosque's entrance entreats me: 'I am here, just relax and you will find me.' My tears have dried on my face and the skin feels tight. What am I doing here? Dear God. I am here because I believe in you, because I believe in the compelling and majestic words of the Qur'an, and because I believe in the Prophethood of Your Messenger Muhammed. I know in my heart my decision is the right one. Please give me the courage to carry on with this new self and new life, that I may serve you well with a strong faith. I smile and stand up, folding my prayer mat into half, and lay it on the sofa ready for my next encounter with its velvety green certainty. Now the burden begins to lift

Katherine Bullock is a second year PhD student in Political Science at the University of Toronto. She can be reached at kbullock@epas.utoronto.ca

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The Essence of the Qur'an

The significance of the opening verses

by Knaled Sharaf

"In the name of Allah, Most Gracious,
Most Merciful,
All praise is due to Allah, The Cherisher and
Sustainer of the Worlds,
Most Gracious, Most Merciful,
Master of the Day of Judgement.
You alone do we worship, and You alone do we
turn for help.
Guide us to the straight path, the path of those
You have blessed, not the path of those who
have been condemned, nor the path of those who
have gone astray."
[Surah al-Fatihah]

These seven verses form a complete chapter by themselves and are recited by Muslims in their prayers at least 17 times a day. Prayer is the heart of Religion and Faith. But how shall we pray? What words shall convey the yearnings of our miserable ignorant hearts to the Knower of all?

The Qur'an teaches us a Prayer that sums up our faith, our hope and our inspiration in things that matter. We think in devotion of Allah's name and praise Him for His creation and His Cherishing care. We call to mind the realities, seen and unseen. We offer Him worship and ask His guidance. We know the straight from the crooked path by the light of His grace that illuminates the righteous.

By universal consent, these verses are rightly placed at the beginning of the Qur'an as summing up, in marvelously terse and comprehensive words, man's relation to Allah in contemplation and prayer. It teaches us the perfect prayer. For if we pray right, it means that we have true knowledge of Allah, His attributes, of His relations to us and His creations. Though Allah needs no praise, for He is above all praise, the prayer is primarily for our own benefit as it develops love, hope and fear towards Allah the One True God.

Since it is the gist of the 113 chapters of the Qur'an, this chapter is called the Essence of the Book (Qur'an). The fundamental articles of faith; oneness of God, His attributes, life in the Hereafter and absolute submission to Him alone in every action are briefed in the seven verses which make up this Opening chapter. The Opening chapter also combines the peak of objectives, namely the worship of Allah alone, and the most honorable of means, which is seeking Allah's aid in fulfilling this duty.

In addition, it includes the best supplication, namely asking the guidance to the straight path. According to the Qur'an, guidance to the straight Way comes in two steps. First, finding this straight Way which is the ultimate Truth. Second, keeping oneself in this straight Way by following the Truth. The question that might arise now is what is that Way and where is that Truth? The answer is explained in the last verse. That is the Way of the favored and blessed ones who know the Truth and act upon it, not that of the condemned who rebel and discard God's commands despite their knowledge of the Truth, nor that of the astray ones who deviate because they lack in reaching the Truth.

The Opening chapter ends with grouping the mankind into those three categories among which only the first one is the successful and the rest are losers. The characteristics of the successful group are listed in another Qur'anic verse which reads *"Whosoever obeys Allah and the Messenger (Muhammad), they are in the company of those whom Allah has blessed, of the Prophets (who teach the Truth), the Sincere (lovers of Truth), the martyrs, and the Righteous (who do good): How beautiful is their Company"* **[4:69]**

Khalid Sharaf is a student at the University of Waterloo.

ISLAM:

AN INVITATION TO THINK

By Iqbal Ahmed, Ziad El-Kurjie & Afshin Afrashteh

Have you ever wondered why Islam is constantly a subject of discussion for everybody, Muslims and non-Muslims alike? One can hardly miss it in international politics, religious and ideological circles, as well as in the media.

Today, Islam is the fastest-growing religion in the world, with over a billion followers from all races, nationalities and cultures. What is the ideological basis of Islam that relates to you, as a thinking human being?

Everyone can see that we live in an orderly universe. One can observe the inexhaustible creativity of nature, its purposefulness, its preservation for what is morally useful, and the destruction of what is socially injurious. Humans have pondered on these facts since the beginning of civilisation, leading to the natural instinct to worship of a higher entity. The Sun, fire, cows, idols, and even humans have been worshipped in an effort to elicit favour and protection. These old and new substitutes to God are limited in many ways. None are eternal, and all submit to present, static laws of the universe. The universe at its best is a painting, not the painter. Who is to be worshipped: the painting or the painter?

Islam is based on the belief in on God, who is the creator of all. God is free from all dependents, yet all are dependent on him. God has neither a begotten son nor a father. God is High and Supreme, but He is very near to the pious, thoughtful believers. He loves people who love Him, and forgives their sin. He gives them peace, happiness, knowledge and success. Only God can provide the perfect guidance to humanity, and not human-made systems such as Capitalism, Democracy or Communism.

To convey his message to humanity, God chose people who were the best among their nation in terms of modesty, piety, honesty and obedience to Him. These individuals included Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and, lastly, Muhammed (peace be on them all). Their message was the same: the Oneness of God. Muhammad (pbuh) was the culmination of all messengers that came before him. This final message is a complete guidance pertaining to every aspect of life and is valid for all time, places and people.

Our life on this Earth has a specific purpose. God did not create us just for a few years of this life. On the contrary, there exists a Day of Judgement when the entire human race will be resurrected and everyone will appear before God and face teh consequences of their deeds in this life. Belief in human accountability to God gives a sense and meaning to life and differentiates humans from animals and inanimate objects. It serves as a reminder against crime, corruption, immorality and injustice.

Islam is a comprehensive and complete way of life, covering all fields of human existence, from the private to the political; the material to the moral; the legal to the cultural; and the national to the international. Its outlook and approach do not admit barriers and distinctions based on race, colour, caste or country. To a world torn apart by racism and irrational national rivalries, Islam presents a message of life, hope and of a glorious future.

The Daily Struggle

By Naheed Khaja

As a Muslim what does a women who wears the hijab mean to you? An old-fashioned, overzealous... fundamentalise? Or is it someone who fears and loves Allah?

Unfortunately, it is not only this society who condemns the hijab, but sadly enough it is sometimes also our own families and friends. They mistakenly believe that a women that wears a hijab is one who will never succeed in the workforce, never accomplish anything in society or that the women will have very few opportunities in getting married. However what many do not realize is that if a Muslim women does decide to wear the hijab for Allah, then will Allah not reward her in this world and with something better in the hereafter?

Those who believe and have done their duty, will have good news concerning worldly life as well as about the Hereafter. There is no way to alter God's words; that will be the supreme Achievement.

[al-Qur'an: Yunus 10:65]

Sure, she may have to go through great many difficulties. However when she truly believes in Allah and continues to wear the hijab, she will attain that inner peace and happiness within herself. And no one can take that away from her.

Can you imagine being a young Muslimah, constantly fighting and struggling to practice her religion? She only wants to practice modesty and be chaste; why does she continue her struggle? Because the repercussions of not practicing the hijab are far more serious than some may realize. She wishes to save herself from the terrible torments of Hellfire.

She does not want to be like Western women; she has her own Muslim identity, one that is recognized by all, and one that she is not at all ashamed or embarrassed of. In the eyes of Allah, Muslim women who practice the hijab are the best amongst all women. And it is when the Muslimah is constantly fighting and struggling to practice her religion for Allah's sake that it becomes her Jihad.

No matter what her obstacles, she will continue her daily struggle with herself and society. She is never afraid, disgraced nor intimidated by anyone; except the Almighty, Allah.

Naheed Khaja is a high school student who is active in MYNA (Muslim Youth of North America). And yes, Najam is her nerdy Salafi brother.

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The Journey of the Scholar: Introduction to Hadith Literature

By Najam Khaja

There is a growing trend amongst Muslims to learn about Islam. Even more remarkable is the concern with returning to the original sources. While browsing through an Islamic bookstore, the new seeker of knowledge can be overwhelmed by the number of hadith collections. Insha Allah I will try to sort out the hadith literature and lay down some sort of criteria to facilitate the learning experience.

At the risk of being too simplistic we can categorize hadith literature into two groups. To start with, the original sources of hadith form the first category. For a period of about three hundred years after his death, the sayings of the Prophet (pbuh) were collected, classified, and compiled in many works. Some of the most authentic hadith have been recorded in the six canonical books, comprising of Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, Sunan Abu Dawood, Jami' al-Tirmidhi, Sunan al-Nisaa'i, and Sunan Ibn Majah, the Musnad of Ahmad b. Hanbal, and the Muwatta of Maalik. Then, there are the collections, which are compilations of hadith from the original sources mentioned above and many others. Examples include Nawawi's *Riyadh al-Saliheen*, Baghawi's *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Ibn Hajr's *Bulugh al-Maraam min Aadilat al-Ahkaam* as well as the contemporary collections which were written primarily for an English speaking audience.

Now before buying (or just reading) a certain collection of hadith, there are several factors to consider. Authenticity is, by far, the most important. In terms of the most reliable sources, the first class would include Sahih Bukhari, Sahih Muslim, and the Muwatta of Maalik. Sahih Bukhari has been acknowledged by the majority of scholars as being the most authentic book under the sun after the Quran. Muslim was also very strict in the criteria that he applied in discerning authentic hadith. Most of the hadith in the *Muwatta* rarely have more than two transmitters in the chain (isnad). Also, the *Muwatta* was written in Medina which was one of the great centers of learning at the time. The second class would include the remaining canonical books. Imams like Abu Dawood collected weak (*daeef*) hadith within their collection because they felt that in the absence of a Quranic verse or authentic hadith, a weak one was better than the mere opinion of a jurist on any particular issue. In the next class, would come the books that included hadith without meticulous regard to their authenicity (e.g. Baihaqi and Tabarani).

But this is where the money factor comes in. It would be nice to have all these collections of hadith but realistically that is not possible. For instance, the English translations of Sahih Bukhari and Sahih Muslim are a several volume works. However, the *Muwatta* is an excellent addition to any library because it is an authentic yet concise collection. But perhaps the best alternative (and probably the most reliable one) is *Lu' lu' wa al'Marjaan* which is a compilation of all the hadith that are agreed upon (*muttafaqun alaih*) by both Bukhari and Muslim.

Other works which are also good are *Riyadh al-Saliheen* and Ibn Hajr's *Bulugh al-Maraam*. Riyadh al-Saliheen was for many centuries considered the standard by which scholars were judged. In spite of that, the hadith contained within *Riyadh al-Saliheen* are equally important for any Muslim to know. Ibn Hajr in his collection provides a source for each hadith and on top of that he grades the authenicity of the hadith. He includes weak hadith so that the reader may be wary of them. *Mishkat al-Masabih* is an important work in the field of hadith literature since it shows many of the relevant hadith on a particular issue. But, there are many weak hadith that have been recorded without being reported as such. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the most valuable collection that I have come across is Nawawi's *40 Hadith*. It's concise and most of the hadith are found in Bukhari and Muslim. Even more important is the fact that these each hadith was chosen because it sets "forth one of the great points of religious belief." And so these hadith give an excellent overview of the fundamentals of Islam.

Generally speaking, when looking for a hadith collection, the reader has to make sure that the hadith have been sourced. Also, the author should have at least checked the authenicity by evaluating the chain (isnad). Footnotes are really helpful. Good footnotes will give the proper understanding of a hadith or a principle. But this opens up another bag of worms since one can ask "which scholar do we trust?" Regardless, the criteria above should provide some sort of a loose guideline.

Finally, I would like to make a couple of comments. We all have to remember that by reading just a couple of these books does not give us the authority to start making fatwas. There is no such thing as an "instant" scholar. We are incompetent to give verdicts because of the fact that most of us are not true masters of classical Arabic, nor do we know how to check the authenticity of a hadith. Also we are usually ignorant of the circumstances surrounding a hadith and of whether or not the hadith has been abrogated or superseded by another tradition. Religion is a sensitive matter, and it is best to be cautious in that regard. And Allah knows best.

Najam Khaja is a first year student at Erindale College of the University of Toronto.

The Prophet Mohammed's Last Sermon

This sermon was delivered on the Prophet's last Pilgrimage:

"O People, lend me an attentive ear, for I don't know whether, after this year, I shall ever be amongst you again. Therefore listen to what I am saying to you carefully and *take these words to those who could not be present here today.*

O People, just as you regard this month, this day, this city as Sacred, so regard the life and property of every Muslim as a sacred trust. Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. Remember that you will indeed meet your Lord, and that He will indeed reckon your deeds. Allah has forbidden you to take usury (Interest), therefore all interest obligation shall henceforth be waived...

Beware of Satan, for your safety of your religion. He has lost all hope that he will ever be able to lead you astray in big things, so beware of following him in small things. O people, it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have right over you. If they abide by your right then to them belongs the right to be fetl and clothed in kindness. Do treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and comitted helpers. And it is your right that they do not make friends with any one of whom you do not approve, as well as never to commit adultery.

O People, listen to me in earnest, worship Allah, say your five daily prayers (Salah), fast during the month of Ramadhan, and give your wealth in Zakat. Perform Hajj if you can afford to. You know that every Muslim is the brother of another Muslim. You are all equal. Nobody has superiority over another except in piety and good action. Remember, one day you will appear before Allah and answer for your deeds. So beware, do not astray from the path of righteousness after I am gone.

O People, no Prophet or Messenger will come after me and no new faith will be born. Reason well, therefore, O People, and understand my words which I convey to you. I leave behind me two things, the Qur'an and my example, the Sunnah and if you follow these you will never go astray. All those who listen to me shall pass on my words to others and those to others again; and may the last ones understand my words better than those who listen to me directly. Be my witness, O Allah, that I have conveyed Your message to your people."

Myth of Fundamentalism

(Continued from page 1)

clergy, that this is rather difficult. There many places in the Bible that are far better understood in analogy, rather than literally.

It is a fundamental belief of the Muslim that the Qur'an is the literal word of God. There is no Muslim who does not believe that. Muslims may differ on the implications of this belief, but they do not, and indeed cannot differ on the primacy of the belief itself.

This is where the West has imposed its experience on Islam.

Westerners have assumed - and continue to assume - that the Qur'an is similar to the Bible. This is not so. They have assumed - and continue to assume - that Islam is similar to Christianity. Whereas there are definite similarities, there are also signal differences.

Islam has never acquiesced to the concept of "rendering unto Caesar".

On the contrary, Islam proposed laws and principles which should guide human life in its daily aspects. As such, Islam is a complete way of life that governs the individual, the family, the society and the state. The Qur'an is not therefore merely a book of stories or parables or history, it is also a book of law, as well as being a source for social and individual guidance.

Unlike the Bible, there is nothing in the Qur'an that has imposed upon Muslims a need for interpretation on a steady level. There are verse in the qur'an that are not taken at their literal meaning, and in fact, they never have been. This is a funda-mental difference between Islam and Christianity : Christianity began with literal acceptance, and ended with a need for interpretation. Islam began with both, and remains so.

Thus when speaking from a Western perspective, literal reading or acceptance of scripture is associated with less happy times. It is associated with the Dark Middle Ages, the Hegemony of Rome, the Burning of Heretics and the Holy Inquisition.

The literal reading and acceptance of scripture is associated in the Muslim mind with happier days. Indeed, it is associated with a civilization that illuminated the Darkness of these same middle ages, tolerated religious differences and produced a plethora of scientific discoveries.

Several accusations are levelled at Muslim Fundamentalists - who, incidentally, are never identified beyond the simple notion of their literal acceptance of scripture. One of the most prominent of these accusations is that they want to establish "Fundamentalists Islamic States " through the use of force. It is rarely mentioned that the regimes that these Islamic Fundamentalists wish to replace are dictatorial, totaltarian regimes that exist solely through the use of oppression. A few examples suffice. From the Shah of Iran to Saddam Hussein to Mu-ammar Qaddafi, the people in those countries live under oppression. Furthermore, it is an oppression supported by us. There is not a single regime in the region that does not depend on foreign aid for its very existence. We - as governments and electorates- recognize the opp-ressive nature of these dictatorships and we continue to aid and abet their existence. And then we wonder, why the people of that region are inimical to the West.

Another accusation that is levelled towards Islamic Fundamentalism is that they are themselves dictatorial. They do not allow freedom of though and expression, and they will establish their Islamic regimes by force. This is an accusation that is worth looking at more closely. Even if we are to accept the accusation as accurate, we are looking at a group of people who believe in an ideology and wish to impose that ideology upon their compatriots because they believe that ideology to be fit to govemment. Is that not what we ourselves are doing?

Is the West not establishing sanctions, and invading countries and sacrificing lives to establish democracy around the world? Do we not believe that democracy is the best system of government for all people wherever they may be? And are we not fighting to impose this system upon nations around the world? Congress is now urging the President of the United States to irrevocably link aid to democratization.

I submit that this perspective on human affairs is a deplorable vestige of the days of Colonialism. In our ethnocentric arrogance we believe that we - and only we - know what is best for people in the Muslim World. We believe that they should be governed by democracy and will ensure that they are even if we have to oppress them to do it. We believe that they should not be governed by Islam, and we will kill them to make sure they aren't. And when they fight us back we will call them terrorists. St. Augustine narrates the following story in his Confessions:

Alexander captured a pirate and harangued him for his piracy. The pirate's reply: "Because I steal one ship at a time, I am a pirate. Because you steal many, you are called Emperor."

Wael M.R. Haddara is a Meds recluse who's too modest to write. But we forced him to anyways.